

Approved December 6, 2004

Illinois Early Learning Council

October 25, 2004

160 N. LaSalle, Room N-502, Chicago

10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.

MEETING MINUTES

Members Present: Roseanna Ander (for Ellen Alberding), Martha Arntson, Lori Baas, Gayla Boomer, Barbara Bowman (for Arne Duncan), Constance Brown, Mary Ellen Caron, Martina Casey, George Davis, Mark Donahue, Claudia Fabian, Marilu Galan, Phyllis Glink, Kay Henderson, Judy Johnson, Gwendolyn Kenner Johnson (for Carol Adams), Janet Maruna, Samuel Meisels, Cordelia Meyer, Harriet Meyer, Janice Moenster, Cynthia Moreno (for Bryan Samuels), Wanda Newell, Claudia Quigg, Elliot Regenstein, Adele Simmons, Leo Smith, Luz Maria Solis, Jerry Stermer, Jaci Vaughn (for Barry Maram), Judith Walker Kendrick, Maria Whelan, Katie Williams (for Joyce Thomas) Kay Willmoth (for Joyce Thomas)

Absent: Guy Alongi, Ann Alvarez, Representative Elizabeth Coulson, Representative Deborah Graham, Senator Don Harmon, Richard Jones, James Kaplan, Lanita Koster, Carolyn Newberry Schwartz, Louanner Peters, Senator Carol Ronen, Eric Whitaker

- **Welcome**

The meeting was called to order at 10:05 by Harriet Meyer. She introduced Elliot Regenstein, Director of Education Reform in the Office of the Governor, as the new co-chair of the Early Learning Council.

- **Adoption of Minutes**

Maria Whelan made a motion to adopt the July 19 Early Learning Council meeting minutes. Luz Maria Solis seconded the motion, and it passed by unanimous vote.

- **Announcements**

Harriet Meyer acknowledged the need for the Council to discuss child care rates. This topic will be given consideration by the Council at the December 6, 2004 Early Learning Council Meeting.

- **Revisions to the Essential Elements for Quality Preschool for All**

Jerry Stermer presented the revisions to the Essential Elements for Quality Preschool for All document. These recommendations were made by individuals participating in many of the Council's committees. Jerry mentioned the importance of the Essential Elements as a guiding document, and reported that new materials may be developed as the Essential Elements are framed for the public. All essential elements will be contained within any new materials as the Council creates new and even more effective ways to explain the Essential Elements for Preschool for All.

- Adele Simmons suggested removing "eliminating regulatory barriers among programs" from the final bullet (Comprehensive 0-5 early learning system) and replacing it with positive language about building a more efficient system for parents. She also suggested adding in

information on how PFA will benefit taxpayers, business people, and other constituencies so that all in the state will see themselves as beneficiaries of the program.

- **Presentation of the Preschool for All Program and Committee Recommendations**

Harriet Meyer presented a power point overview of the Preschool for All Program to the members of the Council. After the presentation, Council members raised the following questions and/or made the following comments:

- Barbara Bowman asked if the monitoring body would assess each program. She suggested that if so, it may be worth putting small programs together into subsystems to reduce costs.
- Mary Ellen Caron reported that many small preschools are going out of business because of their inability to pay overhead with current fee revenue. She recommended that this issue be examined.
- Kay Henderson suggested changing language in the power point from “raise” qualifications to “establish” qualifications for teachers because some programs already have teachers who meet the proposed criteria.
- Judy Walker Kendrick remarked that the document is very focused on institutional change, and does not address the importance of reaching out to parents who do not value education.
- Constance Brown asked whether program service hours can be described as hours per week instead of hours per day, because of concerns that six hours per day would not be acceptable in a teachers’ union contract.
- Cordelia Meyer suggested starting the power point with slides that describe why Preschool for All is important to the general public.
- Luz Maria Solis asked if funding would be available for capital improvement or building new facilities. Harriet Meyer replied that funding for Preschool for All will be discussed at the December, 2004 Early Learning Council meeting. She went on to say that, although funding for capital improvements is not being put in the plan, programs will have flexibility in the ways that they use the funds they receive. The General Assembly may choose to include funding for building when they consider Preschool for All legislation.

Each committee of the Early Learning Council then presented its recommendations for Preschool for All.

Leo Smith presented the recommendations of the Expansion Committee. Leo began with comments outlining the tension between balancing the desire for a totally free program and total program costs. He assured the Council that this pressure did not influence how the group defined quality preschool programs for the children of Illinois. He stressed that access to programs is a key component of a quality program, and that research indicates that those children who are at-risk for academic failure will benefit the most from quality preschool programs.

- Maria Whelan suggested that a bullet point in one of the slides be changed. She asked that “children with Department of Children and Family Services involvement” be moved to the top of the list on the slide “Phasing in Universal Access: Serving 3- & 4-year-olds at Highest Risk of School Failure First.”
- Judy Walker Kendrick expressed concern that it appears that low-income English-speaking children are not “at risk” because they are not listed as one of the at-risk groups; she would like this explicitly stated. She would like to ensure that the materials acknowledge that the nature of communities may put children at risk. Leo Smith agreed and assured that the committee shared her concerns. He said that this is a “wordsmith” issue, and not a content issue.

- Barbara Bowman asked if a standard amount would be given for each child, or if the amount awarded would be based on a child's need. Margery Wallen responded that funding would be provided based on the number of days the program operates, and the amount of funding a program needs to achieve PFA quality standards.
- Harriet Meyer commented that the challenge of Preschool for All is building capacity where it is now lacking. This can be done not only by establishing new programs, but also by helping established programs to reach unserved children.
- George Davis encouraged the Council to examine funding of local consortia, because they can prove effective at addressing local needs and connecting programs.
- Wanda Newell asked whether a Preschool for All program could be a single classroom in a multi-classroom center. She expressed concern that parents who do not meet the income guidelines, or whose children are not in the "at-risk" group may see Preschool For All as another poverty level program for which they do not qualify. Discussion continued about the importance of not waiting until all at-risk children are served before branding quality programs as "Preschool for All" programs.
- Mary Ellen Caron expressed concern that if private programs are not included in the roll out they may be reluctant to participate in Preschool for All.

Judy Johnson presented the recommendations of the Quality Committee. Judy outlined the quality components decided on by the committee for programs serving 3- and 4-year-olds, which include recommendations about curriculum, scope and duration of services, parent involvement, specialized services for at-risk and special needs children, staff training, and program monitoring. Karen Yarbrough presented the recommendations created by the Quality Committee Birth-to-Three workgroup, which include building on current programs to provide high-quality, comprehensive services to at-risk infants and their families.

- Sam Meisels pointed out that it may be incorrect to indicate that 90% of all risk factors are the ones listed in the committee recommendations (those eligible for free or reduced price lunch, non-English speaking children, children with disabilities and children whose families are involved with the Department of Children and Family Services). He suggested using epidemiological evidence to support or redefine the at-risk category.
- Maria Whelan offered that it is important to contextualize the way the definition of "at-risk" is presented, and that the definition must be based on data that stands up to scrutiny.
- Wanda Newell suggested inserting language into the power point that would state PFA's commitment to working in collaboration with community organizations that are already assisting families with their social service needs.
- George Davis encouraged more explicit language around local collaborations.
- Judy Walker Kendrick asked how funding for at-risk children will be distributed to Preschool for All programs. She expressed concern about linking funding for enhanced or specialized services to specific children, as many children come in and out of programs or the diagnosis that placed them in the at-risk category may change. This may lead to inconsistent funding and difficulty building a quality system of early care and education and supports. Judy Johnson assured the Council that Preschool for All will employ a variety of responses to a variety of disabilities. Conversation continued about the need for programs to respond to and serve the needs of all children.
- Gwendolyn Kenner Johnson remarked that it is evident that coordination of local efforts is necessary to ensure that programs funded by Preschool for All meet the needs of the communities they serve.

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- Wanda Newell suggested expanding bilingual education in preschool so that low income children would have opportunities to learn a second language.
- Kay Henderson expressed concern that the concept of who is a “lead teacher” was not fully discussed in the presentation.
- Maria Whelan commented that there are several quality curricula that exist for birth to three programs and we may not want to endorse specific curricula. Harriet Meyer replied that the 0-3 Workgroup wanted to ensure that programs were not reinventing the wheel and were implementing research based program models that had been evaluated and shown to produce positive outcomes for at-risk children and families.
- Kay Willmoth expressed concern that the plans appear to build on existing monitoring systems for 0-3 programs but not for 3-5 programs. She suggested that EHS monitors not be called on to monitor PFA programs, and advocated for a self-assessment process for both the 0-3 and 3-5 components.

The recommendations from the Evaluation and Assessment committee were presented by Samuel Meisels. He reported the focus of the recommendations is not on testing children; instead, it is on increasing provider capacity to use assessment and screening in order to improve teaching and enhance learning.

- George Davis recommended that training and technical assistance be provided to programs so that they will be able to interpret and apply data to improve the quality of instruction.
- Barbara Bowman asked if program evaluation will also be conducted, and was informed by Sam Meisels that the committee will continue to investigate this issue, and that Illinois may receive some technical assistance and support from the Pew Trusts committee that is examining PreK program evaluation nationally.
- Harriet Meyer reminded the committee that this issue will be more completely discussed at the December 6, 2004 Early Learning Council meeting.

Workforce Committee recommendations were presented by Cordelia Meyer and Janet Maruna. After presenting the recommendations and their committee’s rationales, they responded to questions from the Council.

- Kay Henderson asked for clarification of the role of lead teachers. [Dea Meyer explained that a lead teacher has main responsibility for a classroom and supervises assistant teachers. Kay asked that a job description be written to make it clear that this is not an administrative position.](#)
- Maria Whelan expressed concern that the committee’s recommendations that allowing community-based lead teachers to have either a Type 04 certificate or a Level 5 Early Childhood Credential when school-based teachers must have an 04 certificate creates a two-tiered system: those who hold a Level 5 would only have child care teaching positions open to them and would not be able to work in a public school. She reiterated the need for the Level 5 to be an alternate pathway for Type 04 certification so that all lead teachers hold a Type 04 (but have more than one way to obtain an 04). Discussion continued about this point, with several Council members who had been present at previous meetings of the workforce committee making comments about the effects of having different teacher requirements depending on the setting—such as perpetuating stereotypes about childcare being of lower quality and creating a new credentialing system. Concerns were expressed that the language of a vote on teacher qualifications that had taken place at a previous meeting had been unclear, leading some to believe that the committee recommendations didn’t accurately reflect the vote results.

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- Jerry Stermer suggested asking the committee to create a revised recommendation that values both sides of the issue.
- Maria Whelan commented that the first slide in the power point presentation lists the goal of the Workforce Committee, but does not make it clear if the Level 5 credential is an alternate path to the Type 04 certification. She reported that she believed that this issue warranted further conversation.
- Cordelia Meyer cited the committee's work thus far on behalf of the Associate of Arts in Teaching (AAT) credential, and reported that she agreed on the need for alternate pathways to achieving credentials so that all who need them are able to work toward suitable credentials.
- Julia DeLapp reported that the Level 5 credential is being designed to meet the quality standards of the Type 04 certificate as well as Head Start and other standards in order to meet the diverse needs of the early childhood field, including home visitors and infant/toddler staff. The Level 5 was not intended to be only for preschool teachers.
- Gwendolyn Kenner Johnson suggested that all administrators should have teaching experience.

Judy Walker Kendrick spoke on behalf of the Linkage and Integration committee. She stressed the need for planning and providing funds to expand capacity of service providers.

- Kay Henderson reported that pre-conference sessions for next year's Great Start, Grow Smart conference will showcase collaborations among ISBE Early Childhood Programs, Head Start programs and Child Care providers in order to build a base of support, and to provide tailored information to help more communities build local collaborations.

After the committees reported on their recommendations, Harriet Meyer invited Elliot Regenstein to make comments. He encouraged the Council to keep working and to present concrete recommendations to the Governor's Office as soon as possible. He also recommended looking at the Council recommendations and deciding where room may be for compromise while still maintaining the quality of the proposed program.

Harriet Meyer thanked the committee co-chairs and members for their work on the recommendations for the Preschool for All plan. She asked for a show of hands of all those who agree with the recommendations presented at the meeting. All members raised their hands.

- **Adjournment**

Harriet Meyer adjourned the meeting at 12:53 p.m.

Upcoming Early Learning Council Meetings:

Monday, December 6, 2004

Videoconference room locations in Chicago and Springfield are as follows:

Chicago

James R. Thompson Center
100 W. Randolph, Room 2-025

Springfield

Stratton Office Building, Room 349-C

Monday, January 31, 2005

James R. Thompson Center, 100 W. Randolph, Room 2-025, Chicago